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ABSTRACT

"Making good things better" was the theme of the 1985 AASA Small School District Administrators' Conference. The keynote speaker listed four efforts school leadership should take: encouraging people to change, accelerating the growth of people, setting organizational goals, and continuing personal growth. A full day of the conference focused on the topic of evaluating teachers and administrators. One workshop leader stressed measuring performance twice a year, provided evaluation criteria, listed components of a "stakeholders committee" evaluation program, and outlined the cycle for teacher performance evaluation. Another speaker emphasized that the purpose of evaulation is to improve instruction. A second area of emphasis at the conference was improving the curriculum through instructional management and specific changes in subject areas. One general session speaker downplayed the importance of tests in measuring how well students think. Small groups explored instructional management further, focusing on specific subject areas: use of calculators and computers in math instruction, inadequacy of traditional sequential math programs, and improvement of writing. Other sessions considered energy savings for small schools and education-related projects and services available from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. (NEC)

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1985 AASA SMALL SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS' CONFERENCE REPORT

July 12-14, 1985 Osage Beach, Missouri

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How To Make Good Things Better

Making good things better—the theme of the 1985 AASA Small Schools Conference—begins with helping people realize their full potentialities. And that's how the conference began, with an inspirational address on the difficult but necessary challenge of helping people overcome their resistance to change.

There are two types of people, said Charlie Herrmann, vice president for corporate sales of Jostens: "Those who think of life as a privilege and those who think of it as a problem." Helping the problem-oriented people change their behavior is very hard, he added, frequently only possible through "a religious experience, electric shock or a prefrontal lobotomy." But leaders shouldn't give up—there are ways to free people to accept change, Herrmann said. He listed four efforts school leadership should take:

- Coax, cajole and encourage people to change. Give it to them straight, he said. Tell them, "I don't want you to work for me. I want you to work for yourself. But if you don't want to work for yourself, I don't want you to work for me."
- Accelerate the growth of people. This is a manager's job, he noted: "You are the person on horseback."
- Set goals for the organization. In a "no philosophy world," Herrmann noted, "young people cannot recognize an opportunity when they see one."
- Continue your own growth. "Those of us that dare to teach," he said, "must never cease to learn."

Herrmann, the son of a school superintendent and now president of his school board at Owatonna, Minn., stressed to the small school administrators that solving problems was an "ordinary" part of their work but one that should be approached "with a touch of wonder."

Evaluating Performance

If changing people's behavior is at the heart of making good things better, then evaluating teachers and administrators is one of the major "Problem-solving" undertakings in education. Thus, a full day of the Small Schools Conference concentrated on this topic, through a workshop led by Richard Manatt, professor of Educational Administration and Education at Iowa State University. He is a long-time expert and consultant on school improvement, especially through consistent, practical evaluation methods, and currently is developing a school improvement model through a consortium project of Iowa school districts and the College of Education at Iowa State University.

Too often, Manatt told the conference, school improvement is doomed because of a "no hassle" conspiracy between teachers and administrators. Administrators rate a teacher higher than he/she deserves. Then, they don't have to "fix" them, he said. But for schools to be effective, achievement must be measured twice a year, with no "alibis or excuses," and the school board and superintendent must support change based on that measurement. "The Friendly Ice Cream Company evaluates its managers every 90 days," Manett pointed out. "Yet, school principals say they don't have time to evaluate teachers, and superintendents say they don't have time to evaluate principals. It really takes 100 percent less time than people

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Richard Manatt

think, as little as four and one-half hours per teacher per year."

There are five criteria that need to be looked at—how teachers teach, how administrators lead, how students learn, how staff development succeeds and how much all of this costs. Basing evaluation on teacher performance, according to some estimates, may total $150 a year per teacher after five years of experience with the methods; on the other hand, clinical supervision may total $360 per teacher per year after five years.

Under a teacher performance plan, six skill areas need to be examined, Manett said. These are an analysis of lesson plans, classroom observation, data gathering, conferencing skills, synthesis of data, end-of-cycle reporting and job-improvement target writing.

Getting specific, Manatt discussed "curriculum density"—the number of objectives taught per hour. A superintendent could use the "path analysis results" method, determining what gets measured, what gets accomplished and whatever usable data that "will help you coach your staff's behavior," including student achievement data.

Manatt also stressed forming a "stakeholders committee," with a majority of non-teachers, which involves parents and students. The committee should be asked what it wants in an evaluation program. Components might include pre-emloyment selection-prediction measures, transition support, feedback to staff on how they are performing, improvement of current performance, identification of who is ready for promotion or career ladders and compensation.

A stakeholders committee indicates what is expected of the teacher in doing his/her job. The "tools" needed are a generic teacher job description, individual behavior objectives, checks against organization goals and objectives and an analysis of what the individual employee actually is doing.

This performance improvement check should be on a three-year cycle, with each teacher receiving a check every third year.

As for dismissing incompetent teachers, Manatt said "If you can evaluate, you can dismiss, but you don't start by firing someone—you start with a good evaluation program."

In the question period that followed his presentation, Manatt said that peer teachers were the best source for feedback on performance, the best source for discrimination on teacher performance was student ratings beginning in the fourth grade. Parent feedback, he said, correlates .9 with that of students, "but it is hard to get the parents to return questionnaires. They are afraid of retribution."

What should happen in a pre-observation conference? Manatt said the principal should clarify with the teacher the nature of the lesson to be taught and what behaviors the teacher particularly wants monitored—before the observation. The teacher also needs to let the principal know special characteristics of the students. The principal should promise to come in before the class starts and stay the whole period and establish a timeline for feedback on the observation. The post-observation conference should concentrate on one thing to reinforce and one thing to change in teacher performance, he said.

The cycle for teacher performance evaluation, Manatt said, includes establishing the rules, a pre-observation conference, the observation, a post-observation conference, an evaluation report and job improvement targets. Better supervisors, he added, will rate tougher. Great supervisors "can get average people to do superior work."

Evaluation Sharing

Following Manatt's presentations, participants at the conference discussed evaluation and curriculum in small groups, based on the enrollment in their districts.

The purpose of evaluation is to improve instruction, emphasized Jim Humble, director of the Mississippi Bend Consortium at DeWitt, Iowa, at a sharing session for those with enrollments of over 900 students. Finding that teachers in the area did not believe evaluations were being used to improve their performance, the school districts, he said, have worked with both principals and teachers through the consortium to improve evaluation methods. The Central Community School District board policy states, for example, that an effectively written evaluation will "provide specific comments and suggestions for improvement. The suggestions will include 'how to' directives and 'what to do' to improve. List potential resources to employ, including the administrator's willingness to assist. Set goals for the teacher and the administrator to perform to improve the effectiveness of the teacher."

The North Scott Community School District at Eldridge, Iowa, according to Supt. Doug Otto, has consolidated its administrative evaluation instruments into a comprehensive system. Each administrator's plans for personal professional improvement are incorporated into the Annual School Plan, wtih progress reports three times a year.

Managing Instruction

A second area of emphasis at the Small School Conference was improving the curriculum through in-

Gerald Bailey

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structional management and specific changes in subject areas.

"You can't divorce staff development from curriculum development," said Gerald Bailey, professor of education at Kansas State University. The necessary steps for instructional management, he said, are to set school goals, to set subject goals, to establish competencies expected, and to develop scope and sequence charts that will graphically represent major subject-area concepts and convey to teachers their responsibilities (instructional objectives). The scope and sequence charts, part of the format of curriculum guides that will include all of the above also, should be followed by topic outlines, a bibliography with pupil and teacher conferences, print and non-print media resources, teaching methologies, learning styles and outside resources.

There are five "Cs" of curriculum evaluation to avoid, Bailey said. These are cosmetic, cardiac method ("you 'believe' it's good"), coloquial method (vote on it), curricular (don't make waves) and computational (count the pages).

Curriculum evaluation should include self-evaluation by staff, accreditation agency, external evaluation, student follow-up and norm and criterion-referenced testing.

Project Innovative Curriculum (PIC) applied Bailey's ideas to the specific curriculum evaluation needs of small school districts, reported Frank Shaughnessy, superintendent at Trumbull, Neb. The school district has 142 students, K-12, and "when we thought about having a dialogue at each grade level on curriculum, we realized, Who would we talk to? We only have one teacher at each level. It's pretty hard to have a dialogue with yourself." So the school district developed a cooperative project with three other districts and sought help from the regional lab and from Kansas State University.

"The first problem we had," Shaughnessy reported, "was in coming up with school goals," and although that involved long discussions, the decision eventually was out of their hands, being set by new state legislation which included a goal statement.

The districts brought their combined 150 teachers together to write program goals. Each subject area now has a committee, and other committees are set up as needed. So far, the committees have progressed up to scope and sequence, with competencies to be started on this month (August). The goal, he said, was to have a complete curriculum guide finished by the spring of 1986. School is dismissed for the day to give teachers time to work on the curriculum committees. "Teachers say they appreciate our showing how important we feel this is," Shaughnessy said.

Focus on Subject Skills

Another general session address in the curriculum area downplayed the importance of tests in measuring how well students think. Virginia Roth, formerly with the Westside Community School District in Omaha, Neb., and an expert on teaching thinking skills, said that "pieces of information by themselves do not create thinking. What is necessary is to come up with new answers by combining information in different ways. Thinking is process and it requires time." Improved test scores, she emphasized, don't demonstrate that "kids think better. Standardized testing only measures the ability to recall, not to think." Roth discussed the knowledge being gained about brain functions, noting that "we are on the brink of the fifth computer generation, artificial intelligence. How can we allow machines to think better than our children?"

School leaders need to offer questions that should be asked about the curriculum and thinking skills, she said. Does the community value thinking as a primary goal? Does the staff believe that human intelligence can continue to grow throughout life with appropriate intervention? Have you reached a consensus or adopted a model of intellectual functioning? Does the language of teachers invite students to think?

The Small School Conference explored instructional management further, in small groups focusing on specific subject areas.

Shirley Hill, professor at the University of Missouri at Kansas City and a past president of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, emphasized that "mental arithmetic is important, making good estimates and then letting the tools do the work." NCTM has recommended that calculators and computers be used in math instruction, she said, because it believes that students should concentrate on doing what machines can't do. "Why should we teach our children to duplicate the machines?", she asked. Even though the public may not approve of the use of calculators in classrooms, the trend is in that direction. For example, Hill said, the Educational Testing Service is under pressure to design an SAT test that allows for the use of a calculators. It will be permitted within three years, she predicted. "That will then communicate that it is not crucial for high school students to perform like a $15 machine. The question is, 'Can they use the machine?' "

The traditional sequential math program in schools no longer is adequate, Hill continued, pointing out that between 1975-80 there was a 75 percent increase in the number of students in remedial math in four-year colleges. This was caused primarily because of the increase in the number of "general track" students going to college, she said. International comparative studies show that American students are at about the median among developed countries, she said, and are weakest in measurement. "Our texts never have included measurement," she explained. Further, testing programs in this

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country are weak, covering rote and short-term retention math, she said. "We must not limit the curriculum to the skills required for the tests," she said.

Another curriculum panel, this one on improving writing, reported on a district-wide writing program initiated at the Boone County R-IV schools at Hallsville, MO. Based on the Bay Area Writing Project which has spread to almost every state, the program sent eight teachers and their principal to a summer training site, where they worked on an across-the-curriculum plan in writing intensively—four weeks of all-day training. Supt. Ralph Powell principal Doug Stinson and teacher Debbie Gilpin noted that success, pleasure and sharing all must be associated with improving writing skills. The school district's program emphasizes the writing project's focus—that writing includes pre-writing exploration, writing and revision, with equal attention to all.

The Early Birds

An early-morning session had participants at the Small Schools Conference concentrating on energy savings for small schools. Darryl Tramonte, executive vice president for Commercial Energy Systems of Houston, Texas, discussed how to work with an energy reduction company. The steps included an agreement, he said, covering an engineering study of each school building, a written analysis with projections for energy savings and presentation of a proposal that establishes a base year for criteria The companies will install equipment and monitor it, including preventive maintenance, and issue monthly energy savings reports, he said.

Another early-morning session was presented by William Nixon, chief of the Education Services branch of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, describing the many education-related projects of NASA. These include student experiments on space shuttles, availability of lunar samples for classrooms, interactive learning demonstrations and the teacher-in-space project. One resource developed by NASA is a laser-disc program which shows stills and videos in response to a series of science and math questions and experiments developed by NASA.

A number of small school administrators participated on the program by chairing small group sharing sections, either on curriculum or on evaluation. In addition to those mentioned, the chairpersons included Brad Madsen, superintendent at Milan, MN.; Kenneth Richards, superintendent at Coventry School District, Akron, OH; and C. Thomas Bailey, superintendent at Springfield Central School District, East Springfield, NY.

Sharing on Instruction

Donald De Long, superintendent of the Vallecito Union School District, Murphys, Calif., described a curriculum and instruction plan which began three years ago with the adoption by the school board of 19 component areas, including grade level standards, testing, promotion and retention standards, grading and reporting, library/computer skills center, home-school communication, curriculum review, textbook selection, clinical supervision and staff development. Last year the plan progressed to concentrating goals and implementation at the school building level, based on the experience learned in implementing the district-wide objectives. The planning at each school was based on effective school research, he said, and also was tied into state standards.

Another example of coordination between local standard-setting and state standards was given by Donald Hoover, superintendent of the Burlington school district at Burlington, Okla. Some of the activity in local school district, he noted, is being driven by higher admission standards in the state's university system.

But It Wasn't All Work

Although the program filled many hours of each day, participants did manage to take time to enjoy the Tan-Tar-A resort. Preconference golf and tennis tournaments were very successful. An Ozark Barbeque, with a bluegrass band that had almost everyone dancing, highlighted the fun events. Family members were kept busy with a schedule of activities. A dinner, followed by swimming and games entertained children and teens while their parents attended the opening night banquet on Friday. The Partners' Program offered continental breakfasts and a special program each day, including an Americana tour, lectures, and informal "get togethers." Receptions for participants were hosted on Saturday evening by the Kansas Association of School Administrators, and on Sunday by Commercial Energy Systems, Inc. of Houston, Texas.

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